

City of Houston Planning Commission  
Long Range Planning Committee  
Final Concept Paper  
December 20, 2005

This committee has concluded that there is a significant and necessary symbiotic relationship between economic growth and the quality of life aspects of the Houston community. Too much focus on one factor will potentially be to the detriment of the other and conversely, a balanced focus on both factors will be to the benefit of both.

Houston no longer relies on growth by annexation and, in fact, has negotiated Special Purpose Annexations to receive sales tax from areas outside the city limits in exchange for deferral of annexation for twenty or more years. This change in Houston's growth model places greater emphasis on Houston's need to compete with other metropolitan areas for the attraction of new economic development opportunities. The success of the economic growth is increasingly dependent on the quality of life offered by the City.

To reach its mutually dependent long range goals of economic growth and improved quality of life, the City needs a strategic plan which defines its current condition and identifies opportunities and threats for its future.

Houston's strategic plan will differ from many other cities in the United States because it will not be regulated through zoning. Planning will need to consider a range of future development densities and other uses (based on the needs and goals of localized communities). Houston, however, can be active in the promotion of development patterns and other land uses through the use of incentives.

Several specific steps are recommended for pursuit by the Planning Commission and the City's political leadership.

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1. Commit to the development of a strategic plan that addresses the symbiotic relationship between economic growth and quality of life. (Attached is a revision of the comprehensive planning ordinance first adopted in 1990.)
2. Mobility needs a new, long-term focus on planning, agency coordination, scheduling, and identification and securing of funding opportunities. Mobility planning needs to be part of the economic growth strategy to promote growth of property values and sales tax bases while serving the needs of the community in housing and services.
3. The City should have a dedicated focus on drainage and flooding with attention to the coordination of improvements with the Harris County Flood Control District and other agencies. This effort should include the identification and securing of leveraged funding opportunities and an understanding of the requirements of the mandated stormwater quality programs and their impacts on the drainage system. Houston's ability to effectively manage its drainage system will have a significant impact on its capacity to absorb increased development and simultaneously improve the quality of life.
4. The City needs to develop a geographic information system (GIS) that is coordinated with the data provided by others to identify quality of life and economic growth opportunities. Many other regions have or are developing these systems which will become the expectation of a progressive community. The GIS system can be used as the basis of a GAP analysis of the City's infrastructure (public works and quality of life) and as a marketing tool for the City in site selections for businesses being recruited to the City.

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5. The Capital Improvements Program is a manifestation of the strategic plan. Its projects should largely serve the strategic goals. The City should consider adopting a ten year view of the CIP with two components-long range programmatic improvements (representing the bulk of the CIP) and shorter term responsiveness to citizen calls for action.

These recommendations identify short term goals that fit into a longer term planning process that is needed to provide a growth strategy for the City. The growth strategy needs to honor the market driven (i.e. consumer driven) nature of Houston's development process while balancing economic growth with the resources and commitment needed to improve the City's quality of life factors.